

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks During a Greeting With United States Embassy Families and Firefighters in Swords, Ireland

April 12, 2023

The President. Hello, hello, hello. Is this working? There you go. Well, how are you? God love you.

So great to see you all.

Participant. Welcome to Donegal!

The President. Yes. I'm with you. God bless Ireland. Well, I'll tell you what, the Taoiseach is here, you know. And our Ambassador is here.

Taoiseach, come on over here, Leo. Come on. This is a guy who has become—I don't want to hurt his reputation politically, but, in addition to us being allies, we're also friends. This is a good man right here.

And by the way—and Claire Cronin. Come here, Claire.

[At this point, the President's microphone cut out. He then spoke to the audience without a microphone as follows.]

Never mind, I'll just talk. Anyway, thank you, thank you, thank you.

[The President turned to face a different group of participants and was briefly not audible. He was then handed another microphone and spoke as follows.]

And from the time I ran as a 26-year-old—*[inaudible]*—for the council and then as a Senator, I've had overwhelming support from the American firefighters. And there's an expression: God made man, then he made a few firefighters. *[Laughter]* Then he made a few firefighters. Because who else is crazy enough to run into a fire?

By the way, I was raised in a little town called Claymont, Delaware, when we moved from Scranton, Pennsylvania. And Claymont, Delaware, was an old steel town. And I went to my—my sister and I and brother went to a little Catholic school called Holy Rosary.

And right across the street was the Claymont Fire Hall. Everybody I grew up with either became a cop, a firefighter, or a priest. I couldn't qualify for any, so here I am. *[Laughter]* That's how I got here.

Anyway, thank you all. Thank you, thank you for being here.

[The President turned to address some children in the audience.]

And by the way, who are these guys over here? Who are these guys? Holy mackerel. Look at all these. Hi, guys. How are you?

White House aide. It's not going to go that far.

The President. I think it will go close. Well, maybe it won't. Here you go.

[The President handed his microphone to an aide.]

How you all doing?

Child. Mr. President——

The President. How are you doing?

Child. —will you sign—[inaudible]—please?

The President. Can I sign in a minute? I don't want to do it right now. I promise I'll sign it. Well, good to see you guys. Are you chilly?

Child. Yes.

Child. Yes.

The President. Oh, I couldn't—[laughter]. You're not chilly? Well, I tell you what, thank you all so very much.

And by the way, to all the parents, I want to thank you because, you know, being—working at an Embassy, everybody thinks, back home, it's pretty glamorous. But I don't want—you don't want to be around the day you've got to walk home and tell your 13-year-old kid: "You're not going back to the same school and you've got to stop dating that girl you were with and that boy you liked very much. You're not going to be around."

So I want to thank the kids too. I really mean it. Thank you, thank you, thank you for taking care of your moms and dads. Thank you.

Any of you guys want to ask me any questions?

Child. Yes. [Laughter]

The President. What do you want to ask me?

[The child handed the President a small model of Air Force One.]

Whoa, the Air Force—there's Air Force—look at this. It's Air Force One. Right here. It's pretty cool, man.

R. Hunter Biden. In the back. He's got a question. Dad, he's got a question.

The President. What's your question?

Child. What's the top step to success?

The President. What's the top what?

Child. Step—steps—step to success.

The President. What's the top step to success?

Child. Yes.

The President. Oh, well, making sure that we don't all have COVID. What—why—what are we talking about here?

Child. Like——

Hunter Biden. Dad, it's success. Like, what's the—what's the key to success?

The President. Oh, what's the key to success? You know what I found out is the key to success is? And I'm not sure I'm the best guy to explain it; these guys can tell you.

The key to success is, whenever you disagree with someone, it's okay to question their judgment—whether they're right or wrong—but it's never okay to question their motive. When you question their motive, then you never get to be able to agree.

For example, if you say to somebody, "The reason why you don't agree with me is because you are stupid, you are bad, you are—you just don't like the people I like."

Instead of saying I just didn't—just tell you what, I disagree with you because of the following things. Because once you question somebody's motive—why they're doing something—because you don't know. In fact, what happens after that, you can never get an agreement, get together.

I learned that lesson a long time—I say to that to all the Embassy folks too—I learned that a long time ago. There was a guy named Jesse Helms from South Carolina—from North Carolina—South Carolina. North Carolina. And he was a very conservative guy who was very, very—not very crazy about African Americans when he got here. He was all—we always had fights.

And one day, I was going into the United States Senate, and Jesse Helms said—was on the floor of the Senate saying some terrible things about Ted Kennedy and Bob Dole, the Republican leader, who both had introduced a bill for making sure people with disabilities have access to curb cuts, access to buses, and all these things. It's called the Americans with Disabilities Act.

And what happened was, I was very upset when I walked in to go see the majority leader when I heard this debate. And unfortunately, I was more afraid of the majority leader being late than I was just to go and talk.

I walked in, and I guess I looked like I was angry. And he looked at me, and he said, "What's the matter, Joe?" I was 32 years old. And I said—and I went on about Jesse Helms, that he has no social redeeming value. "How could he possibly say things like that?" I couldn't believe it.

And he looked at me, and he said, "Joe, what would you say if I told you that Jesse Helms, in 1970, sitting in his living room with his wife Dot, in Raleigh, were reading the paper. And there was a photograph of a young man on crutches—16 years old, with braces from under his arms all the way down to his ankles, had two steel crutches." And I said, what would you—and—"It was an advertisement for an orphanage. And it said, 'All I want is someone to take me home for Christmas and love me.'"

He said, "What would you say, Joe, if I told you they adopted that young man?" I said, "I'd feel foolish." Well, they did adopt him. They did adopt him.

And I said—and I went and apologized to Jesse Helms, because the idea that I disagreed with everything he said, but when he—but the suggestion that he's doing it because he didn't care about people with disabilities was wrong. I questioned his motive. I never did that again.

That's a long answer to a real quick question. [*Laughter*]

Yes.

Child. How is your dog doing?

The President. My dog is doing well. [*Laughter*] His name is Commander.

Child. Yes?

The President. What's your doggie's name?

Child. Louie.

Participant. Louie.

The President. Louie! All right.

The President. Anyway, guys——

Hunter Biden. You're supposed to do the rope line, Dad.

The President. I'm supposed to do the rope line?

Hunter Biden. Just to say hi to everybody. [*Inaudible*]

The President. All right. Well, guys, thank you.

[*The President continued to greet participants. No transcript was provided.*]

All right. Okay. Thanks, everybody. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 4 p.m. in a firehouse at the Dublin Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Leo Varadkar of Ireland. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and brother James B. Biden.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : U.S. Embassy families and firefighters, greeting with President Biden in Swords, Ireland.

Locations: Swords, Ireland.

Names: Biden, James B.; Biden, R. Hunter; Cronin, Claire D.; Owens, Valerie Biden; Varadkar, Leo.

Subjects: COVID–19 pandemic; Disability rights, advocacy and awareness; First responders, service and dedication; Ireland, President Biden's visit; Ireland, Prime Minister; Ireland, relations with U.S.; Ireland, U.S. Ambassador; Ireland, U.S. Embassy families and firefighters, meeting with President Biden in Swords; U.S. foreign service personnel and families, service and dedication.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300292.